MY QUEEN

A WEEKLY JOURNAL FOR YOUNG WOMEN

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MARION MARLOWE ENTRAPPED

OR

THE VICTIM OF PROFESSIONAL JEALOUSY

BY GRACE SHIRLEY

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THE VICTIM OF PROFESSIONAL JEALOUSY.

By GRACE SHIRLEY.

CHAPTER I.

"ILA DE PARLOA."

Howard Everett, musical critic for the New York *Star,* was just entering the office of his friend, Manager Graham, when he stopped and almost stared at the young lady who was emerging. She was by far the most beautiful girl that Everett had ever seen, and that was saying much, for the critic had traveled extensively. She was not over seventeen, a trifle above medium height, with a brilliant complexion, luxuriant chestnut hair and large gray eyes, that flashed like diamonds as she glanced at him carelessly.

Everett gave a long, low whistle to relieve his feelings, then threw open the door and rushed into the office.

"Who the mischief is she?" he blurted out, instantly.

Clayton Graham, manager of the Temple Opera Company, turned around from his desk and smiled good-naturedly.

"So she's bewitched you, too, has she?" he asked, jovially. "Well, she's the first woman I ever saw that could rattle the cold-blooded, cynical Howard Everett!"

"But, good Heavens, man, she's a wonder! I never saw such a face. It is a combination of strength, poetry, beauty; and, most wonderful of all, goodness! Why, that girl is not only worldly, but she is heavenly, too! Quick, hurry, old man, and tell me what you know about her."

"That won't take me long," said Graham, as he passed his friend a cigar. "Sit down, Everett, and have a smoke. Perhaps it will calm your nerves a little."

"Pshaw! I'm not as much rattled as I look," said the critic, laughing, "but for once in my life I am devoured by curiosity, as the

novelists say—I want to know where you discovered that American Beauty."

"Well, you want to know too much," was Graham's answer; "but, seeing it is you, I suppose I'll have to forgive you. But here's her story, as much as I know of it—and that, as I said, is mighty little. She came here from the country about six months ago. Was poor as poverty, and had not a friend in the city. Well, one night Vandergrift—you know him, the manager of the Fern Garden—heard her singing on the street in behalf of one of those preacher fellows. Her voice was wonderful, and, of course, he stopped to listen. It was just before his opening and he needed a singer, inasmuch as my present prima donna, 'Carlotta,' was engaged to sing at the opening of the Olio, the rival garden just across the street from his place. Well, to make a long story short, he made terms with this girl at once—offered her a big price for one night, thinking that the offer would dazzle her so that she would feel too grateful and all that sort of thing to listen to any future offers. Well, he billed her that night as 'Ila de Parloa,' and her song was great; she was the hit of the evening. The very next morning, what do you think she did? Took her money and bolted, and Vandergrift lost track of her entirely."

"What, didn't she go over to the Olio or to some other concert hall?"

"Nit! She just disappeared, leaving no address behind, after politely informing Vandergrift that his place wasn't respectable."

"But didn't she know that before she sang there?" asked the critic, in amazement.

"It seems not," was the answer. "She was as green as grass. She thought she was to sing in some Sunday-school concert or something of that sort, I fancy."

Clayton Graham chuckled over what he thought was a good joke, but his face looked somewhat serious, in spite of his laughter.

"I made her sit in front and see my show before I talked to her," he added, shrewdly, "and the little Puritan told me, gravely, that she quite approved of it, and was willing to sing for me a week on trial."

"But where in the world has she been hiding since that night at the Fern Garden? If her voice is so wonderful, I should certainly know if she had been singing."

"Oh, she tells me that at just that time she decided to be a nurse—went up to Charity Hospital, on Blackwell's Island, for a time, but the sights up there upset her so she had to give it up and look for something different."

"Good Heavens! The idea of that face being hidden in a hospital ward!" cried Everett in horror. "Why, if her voice is half as beautiful as her face, I'll give her a column and make Carlotta green with envy."

"She's that already," said Graham, laughing. "You just ought to see her! Why, that woman would kill her, I believe, if she dared."

"Strange how jealous these professionals are," said Everett, soberly, "and particularly after they get a bit old and their voices are not quite up to the standard."

"Well, Carlotta is unusually jealous," said Graham, with a little chuckle. "I suppose it is because she is suspicious of me. Thinks I may get stuck on the new face, you understand, old fellow."

"Carlotta should know the world by this time, if any woman ever knew it," said Everett, scowling. "Does she imagine you are going to dance attendance upon her forever?"

"If she does, she'll be mistaken," said Graham, decidedly, "and as for my new singer, Ila de Parloa, she had better not meddle with her. The girl is as pure and unsophisticated as she is beautiful, and, bad as I am, I admire virtue in a woman."

"The most of us can," said Everett, slow-

ly; "but, by the way, what is the beautiful Ila's right name? 'Pon honor, Clayte, I'll never tell it."

"Her name is Marion Marlowe," was the manager's answer, "but, of course, for business purposes, we shall stick to 'Ila.'"

CHAPTER II.

A JEALOUS WOMAN.

The audience had dispersed and the auditorium of the great Broadway Theatre was enveloped in darkness, but Carlotta, the prima donna of the company, was still pacing back and forth in her disordered dressing-room.

She was a handsome woman, of the ripe, sensual type. Her eyes were wide and far apart, like a panther's; her nose aquiline, and her lips red and voluptuous. As she walked excitedly back and forth she threw her gaudy garments aside, leaving only a trailing skirt of rich white silk and a bodice of lace falling low on her shoulders.

"What do you mean by it, anyway? Am I to be eclipsed entirely? Is Carlotta to be put in the background and sneered at by the people, while that little country girl is standing in the calcium?"

She turned as she spoke and faced a heavily-built man, who sat on a trunk in one corner, gazing calmly at her frenzy.

"Answer me, Clayte Graham!" she almost screamed. "What do you mean by showing so much preference to that country snip?"

The man shrugged his shoulders before he answered. He was growing weary of his prima donna's anger.

"I believe I am the manager of this company, Miss Thompson," he said, calmly, "and so long as I hold that position I shall try to fill it, and one part of my duty is to select my singers."

"And why have you selected her, I should like to know?" cried the woman. "She is as green as grass and her voice has never had an hour of training."

"City people like grass," was his tantalizing answer, "and as for training—her voice don't need it."

"Oh, of course you'll stick up for her! I expected it!" was the furious answer. "But I'll not put up with it! Do you hear me, Clayte Graham?"

Again the man shrugged his shoulders and smiled at her calmly.

"What will you do about it, Miss Temper?" he asked, very coolly. "You certainly will not be so foolish as to break your contract?"

"Oh, I know what you mean," cried the woman, more wildly. "I can't sign another for two years without your permission. No manager would dare engage me. Oh, yes, I understand you."

"Well, you'll understand me better before I am done with you," said the manager, emphatically, "for I'll make Marion Marlowe a famous singer yet—so famous that people will forget that they ever listened to a croaker like Carlotta."

"That's it!" shrieked the woman, who had now grown livid. "That's right, Clayte Graham. Heap your sneers and slurs upon me! I have made money for you for years in more ways than one—but now that my voice is failing you throw me over."

"You have brought it on yourself, Carlotta, with your fiendish jealousy," said the man, more gently.

In an instant the woman was on her knees before him, the tears streaming over her painted face and her voice quivering with emotion.

"Oh, Clayte, Clayte, don't you know it is because I love you! Don't you know that there is nobody else in this world for me but you, and yet you reproach and abuse me for being jealous!"

"Pshaw!" said the man, indifferently, as he moved away from her. "You are in love with yourself far more than with me, Carlotta. You'd scratch the eyes out of my head this minute if you dared to."

The woman sprang to her feet and confronted him like a tigress.

"And you refuse to listen to my entreaties?" she asked, breathlessly. "Am I to understand that in future you will do nothing to please me?"

"I shall do nothing that interferes with my success in business," said the man, very sternly. "I would be a fool indeed to let myself be influenced by a woman."

The singer's breath was coming in gasps now, and she clenched her hands together until they were bloodless and rigid.

"Why do you like this girl so much, Clayte?" she asked, tensely. "Is she so much handsomer than I, or does she sing so much better?"

"The public think she is handsomer," said the man, evasively, "and you have read what the critics say about her voice."

"But you, Clayte, what do you think?" was the woman's eager answer; "what is there about her that makes you prefer her?"

Clayton Graham turned and looked the woman squarely in the eye.

"Her greatest charm is her modesty," he said, slowly and clearly, "and she is attractive to me because she is a virtuous woman."

If he had struck her with a lash the words could not have cut more deeply. The woman shrank away from him, her breath coming shorter and faster.

"That is like you, Clayte—to ruin a woman and then insult her!" she hissed between her teeth. "But beware, Clayton Graham. You had better not go too far! Carlotta has blood in her veins, real blood, that will avenge an insult. You may yet live to feel the power of a wronged and scorned woman."

For answer the manager promptly turned his back upon her. The next moment she was alone amid the mocking emblems of mirth. The last vestige of self-control vanished as she fell upon the floor in a perfect frenzy of passion.

"Wait! Wait!" she muttered over and over, between her set teeth. "Just wait until Carlotta has gained her self-control, then look out, Clayte Graham and Marion Marlowe, for, innocent though you are, I shall not spare you! I shall have my revenge! Aye, and it shall be a grand one! Leave a scorned woman alone for plotting vengeance! I shall play my cards most cleverly, but each play shall tell. They shall find me no weakling in the game of love and jealousy!"

She staggered to her feet and began dressing rapidly. It was time that she was out of the dark, empty building. Suddenly a light tap sounded on the dressing-room door.

The woman opened it and confronted a beautiful young girl. It was "Signorita Ila de Parloa," according to the programme, but in private life, no other than Marion Marlowe.

CHAPTER III.

CAUGHT IN A TRAP.

"Pardon me, mademoiselle, but are you ill?" asked the beautiful girl, kindly. "I thought I heard you weeping, and I could not resist speaking to you."

She looked so sweet and innocent, standing there in the dismal place, that for a moment a flush of shame dyed the black-hearted woman's features; then a thought of Clayton Graham and the wrong he had done her flashed over her brain, and instantly the flame of jealousy leaped again within her.

"I must fool her," she thought in that one brief moment. "I must play my cards well, if I am to wreak my vengeance on this girl."

Almost like magic, a charming smile took

the place of her frown, for Carlotta was an actress as well as a singer.

"I am ill, but only from grief," she murmured, brokenly. "A dear friend has died, and I have only just now heard of it."

She turned her face a little and put her handkerchief before it. She wanted to be sure that she had perfectly controlled her features.

"Oh, I am so sorry," said Marion, sympathetically, as she took a step forward and held out both of her white hands.

"It is dreadful to lose a friend. I am truly sorry for you, Carlotta."

By this time the wicked woman had formed her plans, and, as she turned and accepted the young girl's hand, she said to her, pleadingly:

"Dear Miss Marlowe, you are so good and sweet to me that I am almost tempted to ask you a favor."

"What is it?" asked the girl, with impulsive eagerness. "Oh, I shall be so delighted if I can comfort you."

"Come home with me to-night, dear," begged the woman, brokenly. "I shall grieve myself to death if I have to stay alone to-night. Do come; there is nothing to hinder you, is there?"

Marion Marlowe looked astonished at this request from a stranger, but she was not accustomed to stand upon ceremony when the opportunity was offered her to do a kindness.

"Only my twin sister," was her thoughtful answer. "Dollie will expect me, of course, and will be waiting up. You see she is married, and I am living with her at present. I would feel dreadfully to give her a night of anxiety."

She spoke so honestly that once more the woman felt a twinge of shame, but she steeled herself promptly against all feelings of sympathy.

"You can send her a message," she said. "I'll write it and tell her how kind you are to me. So, now, that is settled, and you are coming. I'll be ready in a minute and my carriage is waiting."

Marion helped her to adjust her wraps and then followed her to the carriage, the old door-keeper at the stage door staring after them curiously.

"That is queer," he muttered, with a shake of his head. "There is mischief in the wind; I'm as sure of it as I'm living."

But poor, innocent Marion did not dream of mischief; she was only happy to think that she was befriending this woman. Almost the first night of her appearance with the company she had felt that Carlotta disliked her, and her gentle heart had been pained by the thought. She could see no reason why Carlotta should be jealous of her.

"She is far more experienced and clever than I," she said to herself, for she was too thoroughly modest to ever overrate her own talents.

Now the woman was smiling at her and chatting pleasantly, and the noble girl's heart was rejoicing in the belief that she had been mistaken in the prima donna's sentiments and that Carlotta was really a friend to her.

"Is your sister as pretty as you are?" asked Carlotta, after they were seated in the carriage. She was gazing steadily at Marion with an expression of admiration.

"Of course you know you are pretty," she added, quickly. "All pretty women do, so you need not look so horrified."

"I think Dollie is much prettier than I," was the low, soft answer. "She has golden hair and eyes like the violets; then her form is so plump, and so pretty and graceful."

"Wasn't there something about the two of you in the papers not long ago?" was the singer's next question. "Wasn't she abducted or something, and didn't you rescue her?"

"A man who boarded with us in the country abducted her, yes," said Marion, slowly,

"and I followed and saved her; he was Professor Dabroski, the Hypnotist."

"Heavens! What an experience!" said the woman, feigning great sympathy. "Did he—did he wrong her, Ila? But you need not answer; I see it pains you."

"I do not know," said the girl, very sadly, "and poor Dollie will never know, because she has no recollection of her experiences."

"Well, a man would not meet with much success in your direction," said the woman, laughing loudly. "I fancy you'd hold your own and make things lively for the one who tried it."

"I should certainly resent such an attempt," said the brave girl, sternly, "but I guess I am not so weak as a great many women."

"Oh, no, you are a little paragon of virtue," thought the woman, bitterly. "You are a wonderful creature, and men love you because you are virtuous."

Aloud she responded, suavely: "Well, I'm glad you are strong, my dear. You will need all your strength to resist the men in our profession."

The carriage stopped before a telegraph office as the woman spoke, and Carlotta leaned over and called to the coachman:

"Bring me a blank and a pencil!" Then she turned to Marion and said, smilingly: "You must let me send the message to your sister, dear."

Marion told her Dollie's address, without a moment's suspicion, but she could not help wondering why it took Carlotta so long to write the message.

"I'll just write a line of condolence to my friend whose sister is dead while I'm about it," said the woman, as she scribbled another message and handed the two, with the pad and pencil, to the driver.

"I just told Dollie that you are staying with me to night," she said, calmly, "but to expect you about noon to-morrow; is that right? I can't possibly think of letting you leave me before eleven."

"All right," said Marion, smiling. "I hope she won't be worried. It's the first time that I have been away from her since I came from the hospital."

"Well, you'll be separated more in future," thought the woman again, and, as the outlines of a fiendish plan developed slowly before her vision, her mouth curved in a sneer, which was promptly changed into a smile for Marion's benefit.

"Here we are at home!" she cried, as the carriage stopped again. "My flat is not beautiful, but it is very cozy, and you shall have a room to yourself, so you will be perfectly comfortable."

"But I shall not feel that I am much company for you if I do not remain in the room with you," said Marion, smiling.

"Oh, I'll feel all right just to know that you are with me. If I can't sleep I'll wake you up and make you talk to me."

"All right," said Marion, "I'll agree to that; but, dear me, what a pretty home!" she cried, as she stood gazing into the apartment.

"Here's a negligé for you," said Carlotta, gayly, as she took a flimsy wrapper from the wardrobe and tossed it to Marion.

"It's a trifle too negligé," said Marion, laughing, as she tried to pull the dainty lace up over her white throat and shoulders.

The woman was busy making herself comfortable also, and as she moved about she talked so gayly and laughed so often that Marion began to wonder if she had forgotten her friend's death completely.

"She must be a queer woman," she thought to herself. "She doesn't need me at all. I wonder why she asked me to come."

The more she thought it over the more it perplexed her.

"Now we'll have a bite of supper and go to

bed," said Carlotta, with another laugh. "You'll have a glass of wine, won't you, dear, and a cigarette, to help digest your welsh rarebit?"

Her guest's great eyes darkened as she stared at her for the space of a second.

"Oh, no, thanks," she said, finally. "I neither drink nor smoke. You know, I am a country girl," she added, laughing.

"Oh, well, if you won't, you won't," was the woman's answer, and just at that moment the outer door opened unceremoniously.

Marion looked up in astonishment. There were two well-dressed men, both glittering with diamonds, standing in the doorway, gazing at her admiringly.

CHAPTER IV.

MARION DEFENDS HERSELF FROM INSULT.

"Now, Mr. Clayton Graham, I'll spoil your white dove for you a trifle, I fancy," muttered Carlotta under her breath, as she half closed her eyes and looked scornfully at Marion.

Aloud she merely said: "Some friends of mine, Ila. Don't disturb yourself, dear; you will find them very agreeable."

It was fully a minute before Marion could control her anger sufficiently to rise and confront her hostess with any degree of calmness, and even when she did, her cheeks glowed like carnations, and her wide, gray eyes had grown black as midnight.

She had come to this woman's home on an errand of sympathy, and now, at midnight, as she was sitting in almost bed-room attire, she was suddenly forced to receive the company of two men whom it was plainly to be seen were both under the influence of liquor.

"Mademoiselle, this is outrageous!" were her first indignant words. "How could you allow them to come in here now. Have you no shame, no atom of decency about you?"

The base woman almost screamed with laughter, as the young girl spoke. She was fairly gloating over her discomfiture, and the two men joined heartily in her merriment.

"Don't be frightened, birdie!" said one of the men familiarly, as they both stepped inside and closed the door behind them. "We won't hurt such a pretty creature as you are. No, indeed, we've only dropped in to admire your beauty."

"Yes, and to help eat Carlotta's welsh rarebit," said the other, going straight to the woman and kissing her. "So glad you invited us, old girl, make as big a one as you can, for we are both hungry and thirsty."

"I'm hungry for a bite of those red lips," said the other fellow, lurching over and putting his hand on Marion's bare shoulder.

In an instant the young girl sprang back and put the width of the room between them.

"If you dare to touch me I will kill you," she cried sharply, at the same time snatching a small ivory handled revolver from Carlotta's dressing table.

"I believe you would," said the man, staring at her admiringly. "By gad! but you are a beauty! How I would like to tame you!"

"What does ail you, Ila?" said Carlotta, walking toward Marion and speaking very coldly. "Put up that thing, dear, and come and sit down. These gentlemen are my friends—they will not harm you."

"If you expected them here you had no right to invite me," said the magnificent girl, hotly. "You have inveigled me here for some evil purpose, Carlotta!"

She did not move from her position nor lay down her weapon, and there was a flash in her eyes that warned the woman to be careful.

"I invited them here to meet you," Carlotta said, very suavely. "They have admired your beauty and wanted to make your acquaintance, and I must say you are treating them in a very extraordinary manner."

Marion looked at her coldly and held her head a trifle higher.

"I'm in the habit of choosing whom I shall meet," she said, quietly, "and I do not care to extend my circle of acquaintances to this class of society."

"Beware!" cried the now angry woman with a vicious hiss. "I said they were my friends. You had better not insult them!"

As the two women stood glaring at each other the men watched them curiously. Such an extraordinary spectacle had sobered them a little.

Marion, young, slight, girlish in her trailing white robe; the other voluptuous, sensual, even coarse, in her negligé of flaming scarlet. It was a spectacle of virtue confronted by vice—of innocence menaced by wanton evil.

When Marion spoke again her voice vibrated strangely and she was fingering the little revolver nervously.

"I hope and believe your friends are more honorable than you are, mademoiselle!" she said, distinctly, "for I doubt if either of them would dare insult a respectable girl, while you have deliberately laid a trap for me—for Heaven alone knows what diabolical motive."

For just a moment Carlotta looked ashamed, but she promptly recovered, and her frame fairly quivered with anger.

"Put that weapon down and dress yourself," she said, with a sneer crossing her face. "Your dress is in the bed-room. I shall be glad to have you leave me."

Marion turned toward the bed-room door, still grasping the pistol.

When she reached the doorway she turned and faced them, throwing her head back with a motion of superb defiance.

"If either of you dare to cross this threshold, look out!" she said briefly, but with unmistakable decision.

As she was hurrying into her street dress she heard the three whispering together. The next second there was a scream from the woman and a perfect volley of curses.

Clayton Graham had suddenly opened the door of the apartment and stood glaring at the trio. With a cry for help Marion bounded out and ran to him.

"Oh, Mr. Graham! Save me!" she cried, half hysterically. "See, I have had to defend myself from those fiends with this pistol. Oh, what am I to think of this wicked woman?"

Clayton Graham looked bewildered for a moment, then a light dawned on his mind—he understood Carlotta's motive. He had goaded this woman to fury when he spoke to her of Marion's virtue; now she was doing her best to ruin the young girl's fair name, and she would have succeeded admirably with one less noble and courageous than Marion.

"So this is your revenge," he muttered, facing the woman. "You are trying to blacken her good name, you infamous creature!"

The woman answered nothing, she had been caught red-handed. No one knew her better than Clayton Graham—there was no use trying to deceive him in the matter.

"She was weeping in the dressing-room and I spoke to her," went on Marion, quickly. "She said she was grieving over the loss of a friend and asked me to come home with her, so she would not be so lonely."

"So she was afraid of being lonely—poor Carlotta," said the manager with a sneer. "Well, it's lucky for you, child, that I saw you getting into her carriage. I knew she was up to something, and I called the turn pretty correctly."

"So that is why I am honored with your presence," said Carlotta, sarcastically. "You came here to rescue your new sweetheart Ha from the natural vengeance of your old sweetheart Carlotta."

Clayton Graham looked at her scornfully, but did not deign to reply. Then his glance swept the full length and breadth of her now thoroughly sobered companions.

"I knew you were blackguards and loafers before," he said, coolly, "but I wouldn't have believed that drunk or sober you wouldn't respect an innocent girl. Carlotta must have you in good training, you infamous puppies!"

He offered his arm to Marion and led her out of the apartment.

"Thank goodness I was in time," he said as they reached the curb, "still, I guess you would have looked out for yourself all right. I wouldn't want you to come for me armed with even a toy revolver."

He chuckled good-naturedly as he put Marion into a cab.

"Don't fail to be on hand to-morrow night," he said, earnestly. "Your song is the hit of the evening, and the public can't spare you. Don't mind about Carlotta. I'll watch her in future. She's a tigress all right, but I know her nature."

Marion thanked him and was soon alighting at her own door. It was nearly two o'clock, and the block where she lived was almost in darkness; as she ran up the steps she felt a trifle nervous.

While she was searching for her latchkey she heard a step behind her. She turned around quickly and confronted a stranger, a small, swarthy man, his face badly scarred and hideous.

"What do you want?" asked Marion with a frightened gasp.

"You," muttered the fellow instantly, as he laid a long yellow hand on the fair girl's shoulder.

Marion gave a shriek that awoke the echoes.

In an instant the man turned and fled down the street; he was out of sight before any one responded.

CHAPTER V.

A CHINESE GIRL STEALER.

When Ralph Moore, Marion's brother-in-law, opened the door he was astonished to find her trembling with terror.

"Why, sister, I thought you were not coming home to-night," he began, but the girl stopped him with a quick explanation.

"Carlotta trapped me," she said, hotly, "but I escaped from her safely! Now, who do you suppose that fellow was, the dreadful creature that just grabbed my arm right here on the steps. My shriek must have frightened you awfully, brother,"

Ralph Moore looked up and down the street, but there was no one in sight, so in another minute they went up to his apartment.

Dollie Marlowe, or Dollie Moore, as she was now, had been married only three weeks, but her little flat already had a homelike look, and both she and her husband were radiantly happy.

As Marion had said, Dollie's face was the prettier of the two, but it was a babyish prettiness that meant weakness and uncertainty, while Marion's was the glorious beauty of decision.

As Marion told them of her evening's experience Dollie's rosy cheeks paled, while Ralph Moore ran his fingers through his black curls in excitement.

"What a bad, wicked woman," cried the little bride, indignantly. "To think of her subjecting you to such an insult. Why, she is a disgrace to her sex, isn't she, darling?"

"She is indeed," was her husband's fond answer as he stopped in his excited pacing to and fro, to kiss his wife's soft, dimpled shoulder.

"It is a shame that our dear sister should have to come in contact with such a creature, and to think that Marion was trying to do her a kindness."

Marion had removed her hat and unbound her beautiful hair, and now sat sipping a cup of chocolate that Dollie had hurriedly made for her.

"What puzzles me most is that man," she said, thoughtfully. "Oh, what a terrible face he had—it was hideously scarred and disfigured."

"He was probably drunk," was her brother-in-law's answer. "And no doubt he mistook you for some one else. I'll tell the officer on the beat to keep a look-out for him in future."

"Well, it is very evident that there was no officer on the beat to-night," said Marion, laughing, "for I screamed as loudly as I possibly could, and I only succeeded in awakening the echoes."

"Oh, the cop was probably in the corner saloon," said Ralph Moore, disgustedly; "still, it's lucky you screamed and scared the fellow. No one knows what he might have done if you hadn't, sister."

"Oh, I have some news for you," said Dollie, suddenly. "I got a letter from our old friend, Bert Jackson, to-day. He is coming home to be ready to sail for Europe with his foster-father next week, and in the fall he is going to college."

"That is good news," said Marion, with a happy smile. "I wondered why we hadn't heard from Bert since your wedding, but I suppose he has been having such a good time with his new parents in Canada that he did not have time to write to his old friends."

"He is a lucky boy," said Dollie, thoughtfully. "Why, just think, only a few months ago he was a waif in a county poor farm! Oh, how lucky it was that he ran away. It is not every poor orphan that has such good fortune."

"And I am so glad that I helped him to escape," said her sister, laughing. "I gave him five dollars the night he ran away—it was all I had, for I was only a country girl then, and you know, sister, that our father did not give us much money."

"Poor old dad," said Dollie, with the tears springing to her eyes. "He has been a different man since you paid off the mortgage on the farm, Marion. Mother says he is so gentle that we would hardly know him."

This illusion to one of Marion's many noble deeds made the fair girl very happy. It had been the greatest pleasure of her life to be able to pay off that mortgage on the homestead.

"It is a pity that it took him so long to learn that 'gentleness is best,'" she said, sadly. "Poor old father would have been far happier if he had learned it earlier. We would have all been happier in our life in the country."

They sat and talked a little while longer, then retired for a few hours' rest before daylight.

When Marion awoke in the morning she found that Ralph had already bought the morning papers, and, as usual, she glanced them over before eating her breakfast.

"Oh, how kind the critics are to me," she said as she read the notice of her singing in the *Star*. "And how dreadfully they speak of Carlotta, saying that her voice has lost its freshness, and all that sort of thing. I can hardly blame the woman for disliking me."

"Well, she has let her professional jealousy go too far," said Ralph, hotly. "When she tries such tricks as she did last night it is high time she was halted."

"I guess Mr. Graham will read her a lecture to-day," said Marion, slowly. "It remains to be seen what effect it has upon her."

"Here is a dreadful thing," said Dollie, who was glancing over a part of the paper. "A young girl has just been rescued from an opium den. It seems she was stolen by

Chinamen and kept a prisoner in one of their houses."

"Oh, that sort of thing happens every day," said her husband, quickly. "There's a tremendous traffic in 'white slaves,' as they call them. Those yellow devils have a mania for white girls in this country."

"I think it is horrible," said Marion, shuddering. "It is almost incredible that such horrors can exist in a Christian country."

"Nevertheless they do," said Ralph, a little absently. He was busy at that moment reading the rest of the article. Suddenly he almost sprang from his chair at the breakfast table, and a look of horror overspread his countenance.

"Quick, Marion! Describe that fellow that you saw last night on the steps. Was he small and black, and was his face all scars, and was there anything about him that looked like a Chinaman?"

Marion thought a little before she answered.

"He certainly was small and had a yellowish skin, and his face was all scars, and his eyes black and beady. Come to think of it, he did look like a Chinaman, Ralph, but for goodness sake do tell us what is the matter!" she said, earnestly.

"That fellow is wanted by the police," was Ralph Moore's prompt answer. "He is a sort of an agent for rich Celestials in the city, he goes around trying to steal young girls, and they say that in several instances he has been successful."

Both Dollie and Marion stared at him in astonishment for a minute, then Marion's gray eyes flashed ominously, and her lips curved in a smile.

"Well, I pity him if he ever tries to steal me," she said, decidedly, "for I have no special liking for 'chow-chop-suey.'"

CHAPTER VI.

A GLIMPSE BEHIND THE SCENES.

At half-past seven that evening Marion Marlowe was at the theatre. She was a trifle apprehensive of what was coming. As she tripped around to the stage door every person on the street turned to look at her, for New York was almost mad at the moment with admiration for "Ila de Parloa." It was not altogether the girl's magnificent voice that had charmed them, but her beautiful face and natural, unaffected manner on the stage had been a great treat after a long siege of conceited actors and airy prima donnas.

During her engagement so far she had sang only simple ballads, which were sandwiched in between the regular scenes in a manner known only to comic operas and vaudeville.

But the quaint, modest dress of the charming singer, and, best of all, her freedom from conceit, had won the respect of even the critics, which is a thing not easily done by any singer.

Marion felt strange in the atmosphere of the monstrous theatre, yet she was fast becoming accustomed to its shallow mockeries, and deep down in her soul there had always been a desire for fame, which now, for the first time in her short life, was within some possibility of gratification.

"If it was not for Carlotta's jealousy," she whispered to herself, as she climbed the narrow stairs behind the scenes—"but what can I do if she chooses to injure me?"

"Howdy, signorita!" called a voice as she reached the top of the stairs. "You are early, as usual, and yet you don't 'make up' much, either. If it wasn't for my everlasting complexion, I wouldn't be here, you bet. I'd have spent another hour in bed wouldn't you, Miss Kingsley?"

The speaker was a chorus girl, whose name Marion did not know. She was standing in

the doorway of a big dressing-room, which she shared with a dozen others.

"Do you think so much 'make-up' is necessary?" asked Marion, pleasantly. "Somehow, I am always afraid of getting my nose too white and my ears too red. I do wish there wasn't such a thing as having to use it!"

"Oh, we'd all look like ghosts if we didn't," said the girl. "Those footlights make you ghastly if your face isn't painted."

"It makes some people look like frights, anyway," called another voice, shrilly. "It is just too funny to see some folks prink when they can't be anything but scrawny and ugly, no matter how much they paint and whitewash!"

The girl in the doorway glanced over her shoulder scornfully.

"You wear 'symmetricals' yourself, Miss Impudence," she said, tauntingly. "I may be scrawny around the shoulders, but my legs are all right, and legs are all that is wanted in the chorus nowadays."

"I thought it was voices that were desired," said Marion, dryly; "but, then, I am new; I don't know much about requirements."

"I notice you are mighty careful not to wear your dress short at either end," called another voice. "What is the matter with your shape, Signorita Ila?"

Marion Marlowe flushed a little, but did not reply, so the girl in the doorway promptly answered for her.

"Oh, she's too modest and shy, don't you understand! But just wait a week, girls—then you may have to look to your laurels. Can't make me believe that the little 'greeny' isn't all right! She's fresh from the country, and ought to be as plump as a partridge."

"You are the only girl in the chorus that ain't jealous, Jennie," called a coarse masculine voice, as Jack Green, the "property man," came by at that minute.

Jennie was just stepping into her slippers when she caught sight of Jack. In an instant one of them went spinning in his direction.

Jack caught it deftly and held it in his hand.

"Out on first," he said, with a grin. "Now, when you want it back you'll have to kiss me."

"Oh, I don't mind doing that a little bit," cried the girl, unhesitatingly, and in a second she had both arms over the property man's shoulders.

"You're a daisy, Jack, and I'm awfully mashed on you," she said, candidly; "but you haven't got enough wealth, so, you see, I must stick to the Johnnies."

"Oh, I don't want you," was the fellow's equally honest answer. "I'm stuck on the new beauty, the charming Ila. I wonder if she would give me a kiss if I asked her."

Marion was standing right in front of him as he made the remark, and in an instant all of the chorus girls came out to see how she took it.

"No use to play the prude," thought Marion, with a shudder. "These people see no harm in kissing, so I must try and get out of it nicely."

"No, Mr. Green," she said, with a half smile, "I would not dream of kissing you before all these young ladies! Why, they would scratch my eyes out, and I am sure I would deserve it."

"That's not so bad for a 'greeny,'" said Jennie. She had got her slipper back now, and was adjusting it carefully.

"Make less noise up there, girls!" called out the stage manager from the stairs.

The girls scampered back into their dressing room, leaving Marion and the property man together.

"Won't you kiss me, sweetie?" said Jack Green, in an undertone, as he came closer to her. "I wasn't joking a little bit, Ila. I'm just dying to kiss you."

Marion looked up at the burly fellow and tried to read his face. She had disliked him from the first, but had always tried not to show it.

"I don't think you mean to insult me, Mr. Green," she said, after a second. "You professionals do not look upon kisses as a very serious matter, but, you see, I am a country girl, and I have been taught differently. I am saving my lips for the man whom I shall marry."

Jack Green gave a whistle of genuine surprise, for he saw by the girl's face that she was sincere and honest.

"Well, you are a novelty," he said, after a minute. "Been on the stage nearly a week and don't believe in kissing."

"That is one reason why I shall never be an actress," said Marion, sadly. "It does seem awful to me to be kissing and hugging so indiscriminately."

"You'd like it if you tried it," said Green, with a wicked leer. "Your lips were made to kiss; they are just like cherries—it's mighty mean of you, I think, to be so stingy with them."

"I shall kiss the man that I love," said Marion, softly, as she attempted to quietly pass the fellow and go to her dressing-room.

"Well, I'm a chump if I let you go that way," said the big brute, suddenly. "You're bound to kiss somebody if you stay in this business, and, by the powers, I'm going to be the first one!"

His face had reddened with passion as he spoke, and as Marion glanced at him quickly she found his eyes almost devouring her.

"Let me pass! It is late!" she commanded, sternly.

"Not until I have tasted of those red lips, Ila," said the fellow. The next second he had caught her in his arms and was pressing her roughly to his bosom.

CHAPTER VII.

MARION MAKES ANOTHER ENEMY

For a second Marion Marlowe was almost paralyzed with fright, but as she felt the fellow's mustache touching her cheek she raised her right hand and gave him a blow with all the force of her strong young muscles.

"Take that for your impudence, you cur!" she whispered, tensely.

Jack Green released her and fell back a step, and just at that moment Carlotta came out of her dressing-room.

"Hello!" she said, abruptly, as she caught sight of Marion. "You here again to-night, you little simpleton!"

Marion Marlowe was now trembling with indignation already, but at the woman's words she became suddenly calm.

"Certainly I am here, Carlotta!" she said, quietly, "where else should I be but keeping my engagements?"

"She means that she is engaged to me," spoke up Jack Green, sneeringly. "I was just sealing our betrothal with a kiss or two," he added.

"How dare you!" cried Marion, turning on him furiously.

Carlotta sneered as she came a little nearer.

"I thought your goodness was all put on," she said, coldly. "So you prefer a 'property man' to a gentleman, do you?"

The beautiful young girl turned on her heel with a disdainful glance. She had had quite enough of this sort of thing for one evening.

As she walked deliberately to her dressing-room, both Carlotta and Green stared after her, and in spite of their anger they could not conceal their admiration.

"By gad! But she's a corker!" was the property man's exclamation.

"She thinks because the public likes her that she owns the show," muttered Carlotta, "but I'll fix her yet, the little country hussy!"

"Well, Graham is dead gone on her all right," said the man quickly, eying the woman sharply as he spoke to see how she took it.

"Clayte Graham is a knave and a fool," she hissed fiercely. "I'll teach him to play fast and lose with a woman like Carlotta."

"You ought to have a pretty taut string on him by this time," said the fellow, shrewdly, "and you ain't the woman to be cut out by a snip of a girl like that."

"I should say not, Green," said the woman slowly; then she seemed to think of something, for she turned and looked at him earnestly.

Jack Green was too shrewd not to know what he was doing. He had an end to gain or he would not have been neglecting his own duties at that minute. This woman, Carlotta, had never noticed him before. She had always held her head very high where the property man was concerned, and her constant disdain had nettled him sorely.

Like many another man, he desired what was beyond him; but now his opportunity had come to accomplish his ends; he had only to help her wreak her vengeance on another.

"Green," whispered the woman, suddenly, as she took a step nearer, "Help me to sully that girl's character so that Clayte Graham will believe it and I will reward you handsomely. Say, will you do it?"

A dull gleam of light flashed from the property man's eyes as he half closed his eyelids and peered at her through them.

Carlotta's face flushed through her paint and she drew back quickly. She read his meaning.

"Think!" urged the man, "your position is at stake! If Graham falls in love with that girl he will drop you in a minute, and, mark my words, it will be a long day, Carlotta, before you get another rich lover."

"Well, how can you help me?" asked the woman, shrewdly.

"Dead easy," was the prompt answer. "I'll fix that all right. I'll compromise her myself if I can't find any one else to do it; but my reward, Carlotta?"

"You shall have your reward," said the woman in a chilling whisper, "when that girl's character is ruined."

* * * * * *

The first "call" was given as Carlotta hurried back to her room, and Jack Green turned hastily to attend to business.

A second later there was a slight noise behind a stack of old scenery and after another second a girl slipped out from the mass, and shaking her skirts clear ran softly to her dressing-room.

"So that is the kind of a fellow you are, Jack Green," she murmured to herself, at the same time wringing her small hands in perfect agony.

Marion Marlowe was ready to "go on" when this girl reached the dressing-room. It was a little box of a place, but they occupied it together.

"Oh, Miss Lindsay, what is the matter?" said Marion, quickly. "You look terribly pale. Has anything happened? Are you ill? Is there anything I can do for you?"

To all of these questions Miss Lindsay only shook her head. She was a frail, delicate girl, whom the others had nicknamed "The Feather."

Marion saw at once that the girl did not wish her sympathy, so she said nothing more, but went over by the door to wait where she could hear the call to the wings.

Miss Lindsay hurried into her stage costume as quickly as possible, but she took very little pains with it.

"What is the use of trying to look pretty?" she said finally. "No one cares how I look, so I'm not going to bother."

"Oh, I am sure somebody cares," said Marion, quickly, "and really, Miss Lindsay, you should put on more rouge. You are awfully pale. I am afraid the calcium will make you look ghastly."

"I don't care if it does," said the girl indifferently, but she did smear a little of the red stuff across her cheeks and eyelids.

There was another call and the chorus came rushing from the stairs—in less than a moment the overture would be ended.

Marion did not have to go on for some little time, but she followed slowly down the stairs, in order to stand in the wings, as she always enjoyed listening to the chorus.

Just as she reached the stairs she observed one of the chorus girls waiting for her. As she peered through the dim light she saw that it was Miss Lindsay.

"Perhaps she is going to confide in me, after all," Marion thought. "Poor thing, she is in some trouble—any one can see it."

"What is it?" she asked, as she reached the girl and put one hand tenderly on her shoulder.

There was a curious look in the girl's eyes as she answered. She put her face up close to Marion's so that no one would hear her.

"If anything should happen to me tonight, Signorita, I want you to tell Jack that I was watching behind the pile of old scenery. I saw him with you and with her, Carlotta," she whispered, "so if anything happens he will understand it."

"But what can happen?" asked Marion, sharply.

The girl darted down the stairs without stopping to answer.

"Oh, she is planning something desperate!" murmured Marion, "and great Heaven! she can accomplish it, too, if she wishes, for every one of the chorus carries a sword in this act! Oh, I must go this minute and warn Mr. Graham!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CONQUEST OF A CRITIC.

As Marion made her way across the scene-room she was almost trembling with alarm, for her keen intuition had told her that she was right in her surmise and that there must be no delay if she wished to prevent a tragedy. She peered here and there, looking for Mr. Graham, and then it suddenly occurred to her that he would be in the front of the house rather than behind the scenes during a performance, and that she must look for Mr. Brown, the stage manager, instead.

She had just caught sight of him in the distance, talking to the "calcium man," when the awful thing happened.

It seemed to Marion that she had been listening for it all the time, yet she stood perfectly still for a moment, her nerves tense with agony.

The chorus was going through a sword drill at the time, and everything was moving rhythmically, when there came a sharp scream.

Marion heard an order given, the curtain was rung down, and then Mr. Brown's voice came to her as if from some great distance. He was talking calmly to the audience, telling them what had happened. There was a dim murmur of applause from the front of the house, then Marion heard no more, for she had suddenly come to her senses just as two of the "supers" came "behind," carrying one of the chorus girls between them.

"Quick!" cried Marion, as she instantly knelt by the wounded girl's side. "Give me a piece of ribbon or a big handkerchief, some one. She will bleed to death if we don't prevent it. Now, a stick of some kind!" she added, as some one handed her a piece of ribbon. As deftly as possible Marion wound the ribbon around the girl's bleeding arm, and then, thrusting a stick through it, she began twisting it gently.

The stage manager had already sent for a physician, but before he arrived Marion had stopped the flow of blood.

"Well done, my brave girl," said the doctor, smiling at her. "You have saved this girl's life. It is a pity there are not more women like you."

"Oh, but I have had experience as a nurse," said Marion, quickly. "I was in Charity Hospital for awhile this winter."

"That accounts for it, then," said the doctor, as he applied a ligature.

Marion helped him deftly, all the time listening for her cue. Fortunately there was a good deal for the other performers to do before she was needed.

For in less than five minutes the curtain had gone up again, showing the sword drill exactly where the momentary tragedy had left it.

"One of the chorus girls has pricked herself with her sword," the audience was told. No one, except a few of her companions, dreamed that the injury was serious.

When Marion's turn came at last, Miss Lindsay's arm was all bandaged and she had just opened her eyes with a return of consciousness.

As Marion rose from her place beside her on the dusty floor of the scene-room she caught a glance from Jack Green's eyes as he stood a little way from them.

The fair girl shuddered as she saw his look; it was so full of an ugly, brooding hatred.

"He hates her and she loves him," was her whispered comment. The next moment she was out on the stage, and everything else was forgotten.

"Ila de Parloa's" appearance was always the signal for great applause, but to night the audience fairly outdid themselves. It seemed as though they were determined to give her an unusual welcome. Once, as she sang, Marion glanced suddenly into the wings. Carlotta stood there watching her, with a face that was almost ashen.

When the song was ended there was tremendous applause. Marion had never sung better, and her audience appreciated the effort.

She was encored until she was obliged to go back, and this time, just as she stepped on the stage, she caught sight of Mr. Graham in the rear of a box, talking to a gentleman.

A curtain call followed, which Marion took gracefully and modestly. It was the crowning whisp of fuel to Carlotta's already flaming fire of jealousy.

"I tell you, she shall not sing in this company another week," she said, with choking voice, as Clayton Graham passed her.

Graham had gone behind the scenes to congratulate Marion, as well as to present his friend, Howard Everett, who had for a week past been begging for an introduction.

"How are you going to prevent it?" asked Graham, carelessly, as both he and Everett, who was a newspaper critic, paused for a moment.

"I'll find a way!" was Carlotta's answer as, with a disdainful glance at Everett, she flounced out upon the stage.

"She hates you almost as badly as she does me," said Graham, chuckling. "She'd knock our heads together this minute if she dared."

"It isn't always a critic's lot to be loved," said Everett, shrugging his shoulders, "but, then, I am not ambitions to be loved by a creature like Carlotta."

"You prefer a dainty maid like Ila, I suppose," said Graham, laughing.

"'Signorita de Parloa' is glorious!" was the critic's answer, and, strangely enough, his words were honest—he felt them as he spoke them.

Marion was greatly pleased to make the

acquaintance of the critic, for he had been the kindest of them all in his daily reviews. As she stood chatting with him pleasantly, Miss Lindsay came up to her. She looked pale and scared, and her arm was carried painfully.

"I thank you for what you did," she said, in a tremulous voice, "but it would have been better if you hadn't done it, Ila. I cut myself on purpose—is it possible that you did not guess it?"

"Hush!" said Marion, sternly. "Don't say that, Miss Lindsay. I am glad I was able to help you, dear, but you look sick and weak. Can I do anything more for you?"

"No, thank you," said the girl, and then she blushed furiously and added:

"Jack is going home with me. He is sorry, he says. Please don't tell any one what happened this evening, will you?"

"I certainly will not," said Marion, kissing her.

She would have liked to warn the girl about Green, but another look at the wan, white face quickly silenced the desire.

"She loves him, and it would kill her if she knew," she thought. "Oh, why is it that some men are so treacherous to those who love them!"

She turned back to Mr. Everett with a saddened heart. The sorrow in this young girl's face had destroyed Marion's happiness for the evening.

"You are very sympathetic, signorita," said the critic, as he watched her.

"Too much so for my own good," was the fair girl's answer. "It was because of my intense sympathy that I was obliged to resign my position as a nurse. I do hope that it will not also ruin my career as a singer."

"Nothing must ruin that," was Howard Everett's quick answer. "You will be great some day, both great and famous. There is a wide difference in those words, although many do not seem to know it. A woman with a face and voice like yours should have the world at her feet, and you can, signorita; you have only to think so."

He spoke softly and tenderly, yet with a masterful tone, and Marion felt the thrill of his words through every fibre of her being.

As she glanced up suddenly, their eyes met for a moment; then Marion, with an unaccountable blush, held out her white hand and bade him "good-evening."

CHAPTER IX.

THE HIDEOUS CHINAMAN APPEARS AGAIN.

When Marion reached her dressing-room after leaving Howard Everett she found a note awaiting her.

She was about to throw it aside, thinking that it was one of the nightly "mash notes" which she had been receiving all the week, when a sharper glance revealed that the handwriting was familiar.

She tore it open hastily and a smile of pleasure lighted her features as she read. It was from Alma Allyn, one of her dearest friends. Miss Allyn told her briefly that she was in the theatre and would be at the stage door to go home with her right after the performance.

Miss Allyn was a newspaper reporter and a very clever woman. She had known both the Marlowe girls ever since they came to the city, and it was in her flat that Dollie Marlowe was married.

Since Dollie's marriage she had been living alone, but she visited the bride as often as possible.

Marion hurried on her street dress so as not to keep her waiting, and very soon after eleven o'clock the girls took a cab and were driven up town together.

"I have a lot of news for you, Marion," was Miss Allyn's greeting, "and now that we have a few minutes together we must

make up for lost time and tell each other everything."

"I haven't much to tell," was Marion's quick answer; "only Carlotta hates me and is trying to make trouble for me, and I can't help feeling that she is going to be successful."

"She's a bad woman, from all accounts," said Miss Allyn, shortly; "for, besides being divorced from her husband, she is Clayton Graham's mistress—and not a very faithful one, either, according to rumor."

"How perfectly awful," said Marion, gasping, "and to think that I went home with her one night in the hope of making a friend of her."

Miss Allyn looked at her with an inquiring glance, and Marion made haste to tell her all about it.

"You were lucky to get out so easily," she said, when the story was finished. "I wouldn't trust that woman the length of my nose. Why I believe she'd knife a person if she got very angry."

"Well, now tell me your news," said Marion, quickly. "I want to get that unpleasant taste out of my mind as soon as possible."

"My news will make your heart go pit-a-pat, Marion," said Miss Allyn, laughing, "for I saw your devoted admirer, Dr. Reginald Brookes, to-day, and he fairly loaded me down with tender messages for you."

"Why didn't he bring them himself?" asked Marion, slyly.

"Couldn't," said Miss Allyn. "He's up to his ears in business. You know he only came down from the Prison Hospital yesterday, and to-day he was around looking up an office."

"I suppose he'll be up to-morrow, then?" said Marion, dreamily. "I shall be glad to see him, for he will bring all the news from the Island."

"It is like getting a message from Hades, isn't it, Marion?" asked Miss Allyn, shivering. "Some way I always had a horror of Blackwell's Island!"

"Well, vice is quite concentrated up there," said her companion, smiling, "but there is an advantage in that which we don't have here in the city."

"No, that's so," said Miss Allyn, promptly; "it is badly scattered here. You dodge it on one corner only to bump into it on another. Oh, the crooks and the criminals are not all on the Island by any means! But don't you wish to hear any of the doctor's messages, Marion? There's one that I'm sure will be very pleasant."

"What is it?" asked Marion, striving hard not to show her eagerness.

"I have a great notion not to tell you, Miss Indifference," said Miss Allyn. "But here it is: Dr. Brookes is taking music lessons. He thinks he will study for the operatic stage, and has an amazing taste all of a sudden for comic opera."

Marion burst out laughing as Miss Allyn finished.

"You are surely joking, Alma," she exclaimed, her cheeks glowing. "What do you mean by telling such stories?"

"It's the Gospel truth," said Miss Allyn, chuckling. "A few months ago he was desperately interested in the sick people on Blackwell's Island; now he is possessed with an insane desire to go into comic opera. Why, Marion, I'll bet a quarter that if you started a dressmaking establishment, Dr. Reginald Brookes would learn to do fine sewing."

The flush on Marion's cheek had deepened steadily and her eyes sparkled with mischief at Miss Allyn's suggestion, but she could hardly believe that the doctor was quite so badly smitten as her friend's remarks would indicate, and she was greatly surprised at his new ambition

"Why, he never told me that he sang," she said, after a minute; "although, of of course, I knew he was a great admirer of music."

"He is passionately fond of singing," said Miss Allyn, smiling, "and unless I'm much mistaken, he is also passionately fond of a certain singer."

She pinched Marion's arm very gently as she spoke, but the beautiful girl had no answer ready.

"Here we are at Dollie's," said Miss Allyn, poking her head out of the carriage window; "now you must run in and let them know you are safe, and then you must come over and stay all night at my bachelor's quarters."

Her friend sprang out of the carriage and ran up the steps. In a few minutes she returned, bringing a small handbag with her.

"Oh, Marion, I've seen a sight!" was Miss Allyn's greeting. "A creepy-looking 'chink' just passed the carriage. His face was all scars, and he was simply hideous."

"Are you sure it was a Chinaman?" asked Marion, quickly; "a small, swarthy fellow, with long, yellow, clawlike fingers?"

"He was small and swarthy all right," was the answer, "but his hands were out of sight. I couldn't see his fingers."

"That is very strange," said Marion, half to herself, as she seated herself beside Miss Allyn. "That is the second time I've known of that fellow being around here, and I'd like to know what he is striving to accomplish."

"He looked like a ghoul," was Miss Allyn's extraordinary answer. "I have seen pictures of such creatures; they are always haunting graveyards."

"I wonder if he can be that wicked Chinaman who steals young girls," said her companion, thoughtfully, and then she told of the article Dollie's husband had seen in the paper.

Miss Allyn had been in the newspaper business too long not to know that even stranger things than this occurred in a big city, so she listened without a word and at the end she seemed to be thinking deeply.

"We must be on the lookout in the future," she said, "and above all we must warn Dollie to be very particular. She must never step out after dark unless Ralph is with her."

"I don't think she does" was Marion's answer; then a sudden idea seemed to come to both of them.

"Perhaps he is looking for you," Miss Allyn said, slowly.

"Well, I hope not," said Marion, with a shiver, "but I'd much rather it would be me than my darling sister."

CHAPTER X.

CLAYTON GRAHAM'S MURDER

When Marion awoke the next morning she saw Alma Allyn standing by her bedside, her eyes fairly bulging with horror.

"Quick, Marion, look!" she cried, holding out the morning paper. "Clayton Graham is dead. He has been murdered in his own apartments."

The young girl sat bolt upright in bed and snatched the paper hastily. She could could hardly speak for a moment after she finished reading.

"It was Carlotta, no doubt," said Miss Allyn, slowly, "for they say she is missing and has been since midnight."

"It is dreadful," cried Marion, springing out of bed. "Oh, it doesn't seem possible that she could have done it."

"Well, they know it was a woman," said her friend, as she glanced over the paper again, "and who so likely as Carlotta?"

"I knew they had been quarreling frequently of late—every one in the company knew it," was the thoughtful answer, "but

still I can't think that she would actually murder him, for, in spite of her bad temper, I believe she loved him."

"It was probably done in a second; she had, no doubt, lost her self-control completely when she shot him," said Miss Allyn.

Marion dressed herself hastily and ate her breakfast; then, as soon as she could, she started for the theatre.

There was quite a group of girls at the stage door when she reached there and, of course, they had all come on the same errand.

"The notice on the call board says that the treasurer will take charge at once," said one of the girls just as Marion came up. "He is Graham's brother and I believe he has money in the enterprise."

"Well, there'll be no performance to-night, anyway," said another girl turning away, "but the new manager has called a rehearsal for to-morrow."

Marion waited to see for what time the rehearsal was called and then started back uptown to tell Dollie what had happened.

A block from the theatre a carriage was driven closely to the curb and a handsome young man, tall and aristocratic in appearance, leaned out of the window and greeted her eagerly.

"Oh, Mr. Ray!" cried Marion, as she recognized her old friend and champion. "I am so delighted to see you again!"

In an instant Mr. Ray was out on the pavement beside her.

"Do let me drive you wherever you are going," he said, quickly.

"To Dollie's, then," laughed Marion, as she entered the carriage.

Her lovely face was radiant as Mr. Ray smiled down into her eyes, for in a second Marion's beauty seemed enhanced a hundred fold.

Her cheeks flushed and paled at the unexpected pleasure and little dimples appeared that were not often seen and which made her face for the minute almost as childishly sweet as her twin sister's.

"And I am delighted to see you also," murmured Mr. Ray, softly. "Both my sister and I have been striving to meet you, but you have no idea how busy we are, Marion."

He uttered her name as though it was sacred to him, and the fair girl's eyelids drooped shyly as she heard him.

"You see we have sold our house and are storing the most of our things," he continued, rather sadly, "for there are only two of us now, and we intend to travel. I am in wretched health, and I know it is better."

He spoke a little doubtfully, as if arguing with himself, but Marion understood and hastened to turn the subject.

"I am sure that you must be busy with all that to do," she added, quickly, "but have you heard that my manager is dead, Mr. Ray? I am to have a vacation perforce—I do not know for how long until I see our new manager to-morrow."

"I read of the horrible occurrence," was the answer. "I am glad all women are not like that dreadful Carlotta."

Once more he gazed down into Marion's eyes with his tender smile, and the fair girl's heart throbbed with a sweet emotion.

She knew only too well what he was longing to say, and she knew also why it was that the words could not be uttered.

Archie Ray had loved her almost from the hour they met, and then, poor fellow, he supposed he had a right to love her—but later, before the sweet question had been asked, he discovered that the woman whom he had married when a boy at college, and who he thought had been dead for two years, was still alive, and, more, that she was now a thoroughly dissolute character.

The knowledge had shocked him beyond expression, but he had borne it like a man and Marion had helped him. Only a short time after the discovery the wretched creature died. She had drifted to Blackwell's Island as a "drunk and disorderly," her face disfigured by vitriol which had been thrown upon her by another low woman.

It was Marion Marlowe's lot to round out the fearful tragedy, for at the very last moment, when poor Mary Ray's body was *en route* for Potter's Field, it was she who rescued her remains and gave them back to her husband and to a Christian burial.

Since that time Marion and Mr. Ray had met but once. That was at Dollie's wedding at the little flat in Harlem.

And now he was thinking of going away, yet she knew that he loved her more deeply than ever—she could read it in his eyes and in his voice when he spoke to her.

But the beautiful girl was not so sure of her own sentiments as she was of his, for the question of love had always been put aside by her—there was too much else to be considered in the fearful struggle for existence. Until Dollie was safely settled she did not dare to think of herself, but now with these tender eyes looking almost into her soul, Marion was forced to, in a measure, analyze her feelings for him.

"You will come and see us, will you not?" she asked earnestly, as she raised her lovely eyes to his face. "Dear Dollie is so happy in her little home. Do promise me that you will come and see us."

There was something in her voice that thrilled his very soul and in an instant every barrier seemed to melt from between them.

A sudden pallor appeared upon his handsome face at her request, then a flush rose swiftly to his very brow as he answered:

"I will come, Marion, on one condition," he murmured, eagerly. "Oh, Marion, darling! Don't you know that I love you? May I not come to you as your lover, dearest?"

He had taken her hands in his as he spoke and his dark eyes were looking into hers as though he would read her heart's every secret.

But after the first flush of excitement the loyal girl's lips became firm and she raised her eyes to his face with a tender, anxious expression.

"Oh, Mr. Ray! I am so sorry! But it cannot be! I am too young, too inexperienced! I do not know my own heart! Do, please, please forget that you have asked me that question!"

Archie Ray's face paled to the lips, but he smiled at her bravely.

"As you will, Marion," he said, almost sadly. "Forgive me if I have pained you, but, oh, my darling, do not decide too quickly! Give me a month, a year, and I will wait patiently."

Marion bowed her head. She could not answer. This avowal of love had almost overwhelmed her.

CHAPTER XI.

MARION IS LURED INTO A TRAP.

When Marion reached home she was delighted to find Bert Jackson there. He had come from Canada the day before and expected to sail for Europe in two days, but his first thought seemed to be for the welfare of Dollie and Marion. He was a fine-looking lad in his stylish clothes, and when Marion first caught sight of him she hardly knew him.

"You don't look much like the bare-footed boy in blue jeans that you were last summer, Bert," she said, laughingly, as she finally pulled her hands away from the grasp he had given them.

"No, I'm a dude now," said Bert, very gayly. "All I lack is an eye-glass, a walking-

stick and a lisp. Oh, I know what they look like! There's lots of 'em loafing around in my class in society. The girls both screamed at Bert's allusion to society, although the boy had only made the remark jestingly.

"Well, why shouldn't you be in society?" asked Marion, after a pause. "You have plenty of money, and that seems to be nearly all that is needed."

"Oh, you ought to have a pedigree like a trotter to be real, dead swell," said Bert, quickly, "and I'm only an orphan brought up on a poor farm!

"This society business just makes me sick! I've been in it a month, and I'm ready to graduate any minute."

"They are not all bad, thank Heaven!" said Marion, soberly. "I suppose the percentage of goodness is about the same in all classes. But tell me, Bert, what are your plans for the future? You know, Dollie and I are your sisters, and we shall always be interested."

"Look here, Marion!" said Bert, jumping up and facing her. "I don't object to calling Dollie any old thing you like, but you can't play the sister racket on me, for I'm fully determined to marry you some day!"

"Oh, Bert! How ridiculous you are!" said the fair girl, laughing.

"Promise me that you will not say 'yes' to anybody for a year. Do promise, Marion. It will make me perfectly happy."

Marion looked at him sharply to see if he was in earnest. Just at that minute Dollie came to the rescue.

"Why, Bert, how foolish of you!" she exclaimed, with great wisdom. "If sister cares for you she does not need to promise, and if she doesn't, why, of course, you don't want her to promise."

"I guess that's right," said the lad, growing thoughtful. "They say love is like lightning—it goes where 'tis sent—so, if that's the case, there's no use in my trying to control it."

There was a ring at the bell, and Marion was glad of the interruption. For the first time in his life Bert was growing too serious.

"Oh, Dollie!" she cried, as she tore open a note that had come to her by a messenger boy, "Miss Lindsay is very ill, and wishes me to come to her at seven o'clock, if I possibly can. I must go, of course, but Mr. Ray is coming to call. Still, perhaps, I can return early; it's not a very great distance."

"Try to," said Dollie, "for, of course, Adele will be with him. Oh, I am so glad they are coming! I have not seen them since my wedding."

Bert went away soon, and the two girls busied themselves in tidying up the flat, and at about a quarter of seven Marion started to visit Miss Lindsay. Little did she dream when she said good-bye to Dollie that another trap had been laid for her unsuspecting feet and that she was going deliberately to her own destruction.

She smiled happily at her sister as she tripped down the steps, and her sweet face was so radiant with joy and health that nearly every one she passed turned at once and looked after her.

"What an awful neighborhood," she thought, as she reached Miss Lindsay's block at last. It was farther from Dollie's than she had anticipated.

When she saw the number she was seeking on the door of a dilapidated tenement-house, she breathed a sigh of sympathy for little Miss Lindsay.

"I did not dream she was so poor," she murmured, and then, lifting her skirts carefully, she picked her way through a swarm of dirty-faced children and boldly mounted the rickety steps of the dingy tenement.

Up, up she went, and still no signs of Miss Lindsay. She inquired on each landing, but not half of the women whom she asked understood her, for they were mostly ignorant foreigners who did not know a word of English.

At last, at the very top of the house, she saw a half-open door, and almost as she touched it she came face to face with Miss Lindsay.

"Oh, signorita!" cried the girl, in a half-whisper, as she saw her. Then, without another word, she burst into violent weeping.

"Don't cry, dear," said Marion, as she put her arms around the girl. "I understand: you are ill, and poor, and unhappy, but I will

help you gladly. I am so glad you sent for me, dear."

Instead of answering, the poor chorus girl began weeping more bitterly than ever. Her frail form was racked with sobs that were heart-rending. The more earnestly Marion endeavored to comfort her the more hysterical she became, until at last the brave girl was fairly bewildered.

"How can I help you, dear, if you do not tell me your trouble?" she asked, in desperation, at the same time laying her hand softly on Miss Lindsay's shoulder.

In a second the girl dropped on her knees before her. As she lifted her streaming eyes to Marion's face she seemed suddenly to have grown a dozen years older.

"Oh, signorita, forgive me!" she cried, in agony. "Forgive me for wronging you. I did not mean it! Oh, I am a guilty, vile woman to do as I have done, but I love him. Oh, I love him, and I could not help it!"

For just one second Marion Marlowe was dazed, then, like a flash, it came to her comprehension what the weeping girl meant. She had once more been led into some wicked trap. Either her life or her virtue was in immediate danger.

"What is it? Quick! You must tell me!" she cried, seizing the girl by both shoulders. "I forgive you freely for your part in the matter, only tell me what it is, that I may protect myself. A moment more and it may be too late. Hurry, I implore you!"

There was a heavy step on the stair and Marion had heard it. The girl heard it also, and it seemed to paralyze her senses.

"Too late! Too late!" she whispered, wildly. Then, with a bound, she sprang to her dilapidated bureau and opened it.

"Here, take this!" she whispered, thrusting a revolver into Marion's hand. "And, oh, forgive me for letting them make a tool of me, Miss Marlowe! I would save you now if I could! Oh, what a guilty creature I am!"

She sank down, cowering at her visitor's feet, just as Marion dropped the weapon carefully into her pocket.

There was another footstep heard in the hall and some one touched the door.

Marion turned and faced the emergency calmly, but with flashing eyes, and at that moment Miss Lindsay raised her head and whispered, hoarsely:

"Be careful! It is loaded! For God's sake don't shoot him!"

Marion did not move her eyes from the door, neither did she heed the last words.

"It would not be much use to me if it were not loaded," she said, very coolly. Then, as a beautiful statue, she stood, silently, calmly, and—waited!

CHAPTER XII.

MARION IS MADE A PRISONER.

As the low door was thrown rudely and violently open the brave girl instantly recognized the intruder. It was Jack Green, the property man from the theatre, inadequately disguised with a wig and a false mustache.

Behind him came another man whom Marion did not know. As soon as they had entered they closed the door behind them.

"Well, Mr. Green, you have laid your plans well," said Marion, as she fingered the revolver in her pocket. "You have lured me here on an errand of mercy. Now, what, may I ask, is the next act on the programme?"

"So she told you, did she?" sneered the man, with a glance at Miss Lindsay. "The little cry baby turned traitor, did she, and yet only last night she swore that she loved me."

"Oh, I do! I do, Jack!" sobbed the poor, weak girl, hysterically, "but I could not do it, Jack; it was too awfully wicked! I had to tell her even though you killed me."

"Well, I'll deal with you later," said the fellow, brutally. "A man's wife is his property and he can do what he likes with her."

"Is it possible that she is your wife?" cried Marion, in horror; "you wretch! you monster! To have a wife and abuse her!"

"Shut up your pretty mouth, if you please," said Jack Green, sullenly; "and if you'll come with us quietly, why well and good; if you won't, why then, we'll——"

"You'll what?" asked Marion, calmly, as she clenched the pistol tighter.

There was a sudden movement of the burly fellow, then a quick, cat-like spring from his companion.

Marion felt a heavy hand upon her left arm and shoulder.

In a second she wheeled around, her revolver in her hand.

"Stand back!" she said, sternly. "Don't lay a hand on me, cowards! I'll shoot you like dogs if you dare touch me or this woman!"

Both men fell back for the space of a second, then together they sprang at her and seized her arms.

Marion snapped the trigger of the pistol in the leader's face. There was no report; the weapon was broken.

In less than a minute the beautiful, struggling girl was bound and gagged. The last that she remembered was hearing Miss Lindsay cry for mercy.

When she opened her eyes again she was in a closed carriage. There was a handkerchief across her mouth and her wrists were tied together loosely.

Opposite her in the carriage sat Jack Green's companion. His dark, burning eyes gleamed at her from under a slouch hat and never left her face for a moment.

The air in the carriage was almost stifling, and without thinking of the consequences Marion half rose from her seat and with her manacled hands made a feeble effort to lower the window.

"The window is locked and so are the doors," said a muffled voice. "You are a prisoner, Miss Marlowe, so you may as well submit gracefully."

Marion glanced at the speaker as she sank back upon her seat. The voice was almost familiar. She tried to think where she had heard it.

After that not a word was spoken until the carriage stopped. They had been riding for a long time and Marion was almost exhausted.

Some one opened the carriage door from the outside and let in a shaft of light from the side lamps.

The young girl caught one glimpse of a hideous face, and then drew back with a gasp of horror.

It was the Chinaman with the fearfully scarred face who stood by the step. In the glare of the lamp she had recognized him instantly.

"Get out!"

The words were spoken in the same muffled voice by the occupant of the carriage, and as Marion rose to her feet her companion deftly blindfolded her.

She could smell a sickening odor as the hideous Chinaman took her in his arms. It made her ill and faint almost in a second.

The poor girl realized that she was being carried into some sort of a house and almost instinctively she guessed that it was a laundry. Passing through a room that smelled strongly of suds, she could feel that she was being carried down some steps and through a long, narrow passage-way. At last a key clicked in a lock and a door was opened and then closed behind her. She had evidently arrived at the end of her journey.

In an instant the bands were entirely removed, and as she opened her eyes and looked about she almost cried aloud in astonishment.

It was as if she had been suddenly transported to another sphere—there was absolutely nothing familiar in a single detail of her surroundings.

She was in a large, low room, hung with Oriental tapestries and covered with thick, rich rugs. There were multi-colored lanterns hanging from various points of the ceiling, and low couches, small tables and magnificently inlaid stools were scattered profusely about the apartment.

The hideous Chinaman had disappeared completely, but her companion in the carriage was still seated at her side; he seemed to be watching her amazement with a great deal of satisfaction.

As Marion gazed about she soon became sensible of a delicate, all-pervading odor—it greeted her nostrils at every turn and was slowly exerting its influences upon her senses as a powerful soporific.

"Where am I? What is this place?" she demanded of her companion. "How dare you bring me here! Have you no regard for the laws of your country?"

There was a soft, low chuckle from the

man at her side. Marion held her breath for a second as she heard it. "Let me out of this place at once!" she said, furiously, "I demand that you set me at liberty, sir! What have I done to you that you should treat me so shamefully?"

"Shall I tell you?" hissed a low voice that she now recognized fully. "Shall I tell you what you have done, Signorita Ila de Parloa?"

"What, you, Carlotta?" cried Marion, aghast. "You, a woman, have stooped to this hideous crime? Yes, tell me at once, if you can, what I have done to deserve it!"

She was facing her companion with absolute fearlessness now, and, as the woman threw off her slouch hat together with a wig and false beard, the two stood glaring fiercely at each other in the strange apartment.

"I'll tell you what you did, you little country innocent!" cried Carlotta, furiously. "You robbed me of my laurels as prima donna of our company, then you robbed me of the man whose very shadow I adored, and yes, you goaded me on to such jealous rage that I killed my lover! I killed Clayton Graham because you came between us, Marion Marlowe!"

"Oh, no, never!" cried Marion, who was aghast with horror. "You killed him in a fit of ungovernable temper. It was not because of me—I am innocent, Carlotta."

"I do not choose to think so," said the woman, scornfully. "I vowed to have revenge and I have won it—to my sorrow!"

The groan of agony that followed these words almost melted Marion's heart to pity. The woman was vile, she was all that was loathesome and bad, yet God alone knew the depths of her suffering.

In another instant she was shaking with sobs; yet her great dark eyes only burned with the agony of hate; there was no tears of relief for the wretched Carlotta.

"Why have you brought me here?" demanded Marion again, as soon as she could control herself sufficiently to ask the question.

The answer sent a thrill of horror through every fiber of her body, it was so utterly diabolical, so cold, cruel and fiendish.

Carlotta raised her head and fixed her burning eyes upon Marion's face.

"This is an opium den, the best and the worst in the city," she said, hoarsely. "Men and women come here to live and die. It is better, they think, than dying in prison. I have come here to smoke the drug and dream. I want to sleep and dream—to dream and sleep. Perhaps I shall find rest for the agony of my soul; perhaps I shall only find torture to the very end; but in either case I want you here to keep me company."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DIABOLICAL BARGAIN.

As Carlotta ceased speaking she tapped a curiously shaped bell. In an instant a Chinese servant entered noiselessly.

"I want to smoke, John," said the woman, with a wave of her hand. Marion's eyes followed the motion and saw she had pointed toward an "opium layout" on one of the small tables.

The grave girl watched what followed with wide-staring eyes. She had not fully realized yet that she was really a prisoner.

Carlotta, as one who was perfectly familiar with the place, stepped behind a heavy curtain. When she emerged again she had completely discarded her disguise and was dressed in a long, loose Oriental garment.

Without a word to Marion she passed slowly across the room. There was another heavy portiere before her—she disappeared behind it.

In a moment the Chinaman followed, carrying the little table. His movements were so noiseless and cat-like that they were almost uncanny.

Marion walked deliberately toward the curtain and looked behind it, then darted back with an exclamation of horror.

What she saw was another room adjoining the one she was in, but this apartment was fitted with curious berth-like beds, and in three of these she saw women sleeping.

A glance was enough to show her the full horror of the place, for upon one face was stamped the most hideous expression that

could be conceived—as if the dreamer was being tormented by unspeakable visions.

Two Chinamen in their native garments, but with queues curled tightly around their heads, were sitting by the sleepers, preparing the opium, and as they rolled the little "pills" in their long yellow fingers, Marion clasped her hands before her eyes—it was too horrible to witness.

"Oh, I am lost, I am lost!" she whispered to herself. "If ever I am forced to touch that stuff I shall die of horror! Oh, this is awful! awful!"

She sprang back into the large room which she now concluded was a sort of parlor, and just at that instant she became aware that some one was watching her.

She turned to find the beady eyes of an Oriental fixed steadily upon her. He was better dressed than the others, and his fingers were covered with jewels.

"Oh, sir!" cried Marion, desperately, "for the love of Heaven, save me! Help me to escape from this place and I will reward you handsomely!"

Much to her delight the fellow understood her, but he shook his head and crept softly nearer, as he answered:

"Chi-Lung-Hing no savee, he keepee, treat allee light. Chinamen muchee love Amelican bleauty," he murmured, glibly.

Marion shuddered as she caught the full meaning of his words. His eyes were fixed upon her with an expression of gloating that filled her soul with horror.

"But I will not stay! He shall not keep me!" she cried, in desperation. "I will set the house on fire and perish in the flames before you shall keep me prisoner."

She spoke so firmly and her eyes gleamed with such fury that the Celestial actually looked frightened. He edged a little nearer.

"What, no love Chinaman money, Missee? No workee—no slavee—Chi-Lung-Hing mally Amelican bleauty—Dlive her plenty pletty dresses—makee her happy!"

"Never!" cried Marion, who was now thoroughly alarmed. She bounded away from him and began examining the premises.

There was nothing but the four walls and they seemed almost impervious to sound. She began to think that the magnificent room was located in a cellar.

The Celestial watched her with glittering, stealthy eyes as she peered behind each curtain and then in a fit of desperation shook the one door of the apartment.

"I am a prisoner!" she cried, at last. "Oh, Dollie, little sister, will I ever come back to you?"

She sank down on a divan to think a little, then once more she rushed over to the curtain to look for Carlotta.

As she peered behind the heavy drapery she saw that something unusual was evidently happening. The three Chinamen inside were whispering excitedly to each other. Carlotta was lying in one of the bunks, her face strangely blue and distorted, and as Marion stared at her from the entrance, she felt the bejeweled Chinaman slip past her. Something was wrong with Carlotta, she did not know what—she moved forward a step and her foot struck something lying on the carpet.

Marion bent down and picked it up—it was an ordinary key. In an instant she had flown back across the room to the door and had opened it softly.

The next moment she found herself in a heavily draped hall-way. It was so thickly strewn with rugs and mats that no sound from the outer world could possibly penetrate to it.

The young girl darted ahead, peering behind the heavy curtains in hopes of finding an exit, but after a few terrible moments, during each of which she expected that her Chinese jailer would notice her flight and follow her, she suddenly heard muffled voices behind one of the draperies and tried to calm herself enough to listen.

"You promised the woman five hundred dollars," said Jack Green's voice on the other side of the thick curtain, "and you promised me three hundred if I would help her. Now the girl is here—we have kept our part of the bargain. If she escapes you now, it is not our fault, is it?"

"She will not escape," answered a soft, Oriental voice, in the clearest English. "Your American girls like my Chinese

harem. She will stay from preference after she becomes acquainted."

"Or after you have made her your wife, you mean," said Jack Green, with a laugh. "Well, I'm telling you right now—this girl is a beauty."

"I must see her before I pay," said the voice again. "Wait here; I will go in: if I like her, you shall have your money."

"I agree to that," was Jack Green's quick answer, "but don't expect a tame bird, Chi-Lung, for Marion Marlowe is a wild one!"

"I will find a way to tame her," said the oily voice. There was silence after that, and Marion clenched her hands in fury.

"Listen!"

Jack Green spoke suddenly and in evident alarm.

There was a commotion of some kind above her head. Marion listened intently as she crouched in the semi-darkness.

"Some trouble in the laundry," said the musical voice. "A great scheme, that laundry in the front of this building."

"Nevertheless that noise sounds serious," said Green, again.

There was the sound of chairs moving as if they had both risen.

Marion listened again. The noise above her head was growing louder. Not only were there sounds of trampling feet, but a great confusion of voices, all talking together.

Suddenly Marion heard a crash and a fearful shriek, then a score of slip-shod feet seemed scampering to shelter.

For an instant the young girl stood almost petrified with fear; then she turned and fled through the narrow hall-way, hardly knowing or caring in which direction.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE END OF THE TRAGEDY.

A sharp turn in the hallway caused Marion to shriek with terror. Two hideous Chinamen had sprung at her, and as they caught her in their arms, one of the beady-eyed wretches forced a saturated cloth over her nostrils.

Marion felt her breath coming in quick, short gasps. She struggled feebly, but her brain seemed reeling.

In a flash she was carried along the hall, down a flight of steep steps, and then, after the click of a key in a lock, she was taken into a room that was as dark as a dungeon. A confused jargon of voices came faintly to her ears, and she could feel that the place was fairly swarming with the yellow devils.

The entire roomful of beings seemed to fall back as she was carried along, and at last she was placed on a sort of divan in the very darkest and most heavily-draped corner of what seemed to her to be a subterranean apartment. The cloth on her nostrils was pungent with narcotics, but she managed by a great effort of the will to somewhat resist its influence.

Suddenly the light of a swinging lamp flashed from somewhere above her head, and one glance about her made Marion's heart grow sick with horror.

A score or more of those gaunt-cheeked fellows were surrounding her, and as the first ray of the lamp fell upon her face, they all pressed forward and peered at her sharply.

In the onslaught which his companions made on him the fellow who was holding the cloth to Marion's face dropped it from his fingers, and with the first clear breath Marion dashed to her feet and confronted them.

"Stand back! Don't you dare to touch me!" she cried, springing up on the divan, which stood directly under the hanging lamp.

In a second a dozen pairs of long, skinny hands were reached out for her, and as Marion felt them clutching her arms and body, she gave a shriek that awoke the echoes.

The next instant she reached up quickly and, with one blow of her white hand, shivered the glass of the lamp; then, with the flame blowing wildly in the draughts of the room, she broke it from its fastenings and began swinging it like a censor.

"Stand back!" she shouted again. "Don't you dare to come nearer! I will burn your house down about your heads if you lay a finger upon me!"

As she spoke she waved the lamp closer to the draperies, and the Chinamen fell back and began chattering excitedly.

For just a second she held them at bay,

while the glare from the lamp illumined her glorious features. Then, from directly over her head, there came a sharp, shrill whistle. As the Chinamen heard it they seemed to lose their wits entirely, and in an instant their beautiful prisoner was forgotten.

With shrieks and yells of rage they scrambled over each other, and then slunk like rats into the darkest corners.

Once more the young girl's voice rang out like a bugle blast, and then, to her unbounded delight, it was answered from somewhere.

Cry after cry issued rapidly from her lips. They were coming to save her. She could hear footsteps and voices.

As the door was burst in a gust of wind extinguished her lamp, and Marion sank down upon the divan in utter helplessness.

"Miss Marlowe! Is it possible! Thank Heaven, I am in time!"

It was Howard Everett who spoke, and with a cry of joy Marion answered him.

A score of burly policemen seemed to fill the place, and Everett drew her closely to his side as they darted about after the Celestials.

"They are raiding the place," he whispered in her ear. "How fortunate that the attempt was so opportune! For once in my life my good angel must have guided me! Come, let us get out of this," he added, leading Marion to the door and half lifting her up the steps to the narrow hallway.

"But Carlotta! Have they found her?" asked Marion, in a whisper.

"The woman is dead! I did not mean she should escape me," was her companion's answer. "It seems she had heart disease, and the opium killed her. Well, at last my friend Graham's death has been avenged, but your presence here, Miss Marlowe! I cannot understand it!"

Marion held out her hand to him as she was being hurried along.

"You followed her here because you think she was his murderer?" she whispered, softly.

"I had no doubt of it," was Everett's reply. "Detectives have been watching the woman ever since. They tracked her here, and then I asked the captain to raid the place."

They were passing through the pseudo laundry now, but there was not a Chinaman in sight. The room was absolutely deserted.

"And you heard my voice?" asked the young girl, as Mr. Everett supported her tenderly.

"Yes, but did not recognize it, of course," said Mr. Everett, quickly. "I thought it was the voice of one of their white slaves. But do hurry, Miss Marlowe, and tell me how you came here."

With a tremendous stamping of feet the policemen came into the laundry.

"Nine chinks," one white man and four women, one dead," said the captain, in reply to a question from Everett.

The critic whispered a few words in his ear relating to Marion, and, with a sharp glance at her face, the captain nodded.

"We've taken them all out through a side door to this establishment that we found, and three of my men have taken them away in the patrol wagon. Come, boys, let's get out of this dope hole as soon as possible! Whew! The aroma is something awful! I'll be asleep in another minute!"

"I thought I should faint when I first encountered it," said Marion to Everett. "Oh, how thankful I am to you, Mr. Everett!"

There was a carriage at the curb, and the critic helped her into it.

"What a narrow escape I have had!" cried the girl, as Everett got in beside her. "An hour longer in that place and I should have been dead—like Carlotta!"

Then she hastened to tell her friend the whole story of her adventure.

The papers were full of it the next day, and, thanks to Howard Everett, every detail was given accurately.

Beautiful Marion's escape from the lair of the Celestials formed the talk of the town for days. She was perhaps the first white girl to leave that place untainted.

Both she and Mr. Everett appeared before the authorities the next day, and it was not long before Chi-Lung-Hing, his subjects, and Jack Green were all safely in prison.

The three white girls were restored to their homes and parents, and the numerous expensive opium "layouts" were confiscated and destroyed by the police.

The wicked Carlotta left money enough to afford her a decent burial, but there was not a mourner at her dreary funeral.

The Temple Opera Company was obliged to disband; but now that Miss Lindsay was freed from her brutal husband, she was able to take a position in another organization and live very comfortably on her modest salary.

At Miss Allyn's urgent request, Marion went to live with her until she could secure another position, and besides Dr. Brookes and Mr. Ray, Howard Everett, the critic, was soon a frequent caller at the little flat.

But Marion was as loyal to her associates as ever, and she was so pure, so true and so noble in character that no thought of jealousy ever annoyed for a long time any of her friends who loved her.

THE END.

The next number will contain "Marion Marlowe's Peril; or, A Mystery Unveiled."

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

BY GRACE SHIRLEY

NOTE.—This department will be made a special feature of this publication. It will be conducted by Miss Shirley, whose remarkable ability to answer all questions, no matter how delicate the import, will be much appreciated, we feel sure, by all our readers, who need not hesitate to write her on any subject. Miss Shirley will have their interests at heart and never refuse her assistance or sympathy. STREET & SMITH.

"Will you please advise me in the following matter? I am engaged to a young man who is only making twenty dollars a week, and who is obliged to support his old father and mother. If I marry him I must live with the old folks, and do all the work. Do you think by doing this I could ever be happy? MAMIE."

We think the chances are that you would be very miserable indeed. You had better wait until the young man is able to employ some one to take care of his parents, and then you can have your own little nest together. It is not well, as a rule, for a young married couple to begin life in the same house with their relatives.

"I have been reading the 'Marion Marlowe' stories with great interest, but I am inclined to think that Marion is something of a coquette, and that she does not seem to know her own mind where her lovers are concerned. The stories are very interesting and exciting, and I enjoy them immensely, but I felt sorry for 'Archie Ray' and 'Dr. Brookes.' I feel like scolding Marion because she does not love them. I wish I had her chance to marry either one of them. If they are really true characters I wish you would send me their addresses. M. B."

We are glad to hear that you are reading the "My Queen" series, but we are afraid you have not studied Marion's character very thoroughly. She has been absolutely honest with the two young men you mention, and no one would resent the term of "coquette" more quickly than they would. Unfortunately, we do not know their addresses at present, so we cannot favor you, but no doubt, both gentlemen would feel honored at your candid appreciation.

"I have been married two years, and have a baby six months old. My husband says I give all my time to the baby and none to him. The baby is delicate, and no one can soothe him except his mother. If I must neglect either one, which should be neglected? FLORENCE McK."

This is the same old story that we have heard many times. Many married men use it as an excuse for spending their time elsewhere, and God pity the wives of such inhuman monsters! You have brought an innocent child into this world of sin and woe. It is your duty to devote yourself to it just so long as it needs or claims your devotion. The claims of wife are nothing when compared with the duty of motherhood. The man or woman who would neglect his or her own child for even one hour is guilty of the greatest sin that can be committed. You cannot expect your child to grow up loving or respecting you unless you have proven yourself worthy of these sentiments. Try and make your husband understand your position and his in this important matter.

"I have been brought up to think that it was a sin to drink liquor, and now I am deeply in love with a young man who often drinks a glass of wine; who, to the best of my knowledge, has never been tipsy. Would I be doing right to marry this man? I do not know how I can give him up, and yet I hate to go against my principle. EDNA."

Your anxiety is very natural, but we hardly think you would be doing wrong to marry a man who takes a glass of wine occasionally. History is filled with the names of great men who were not total abstainers. If liquor disagrees with a man, or he is prone to yield to its insidious fascination, that is another matter, but the mere fact of a man taking an occasional drink is not a sign that he is destined to fill a drunkard's grave. Total abstinence is commendable, and in the case of men weak in will power it is almost a necessity, but many a man who is a moderate drinker will prove a better husband than the total abstainer, whose other virtues are not as fully developed as his abstinence.

Study the character of the man whom you think perhaps to marry. If he is honorable, brave and true, you can safely trust your life's happiness in his hands, despite his occasional glass of wine.

"I am so sick at heart that I can hardly write this letter, but I must know your opinion, my dear Miss Shirley. I have been deeply in love for over a year, and now I am forced to believe

that the object of my affections has forsaken me for another. Oh, what can I do to win him back! I shall certainly die if I have to live another week without him! IMOGEN S."

There is anguish in every word of this letter, and we are very sorry indeed for you, Imogen. There is no grief so poignant as that which a young girl feels when she awakes to the fact which you seem to have discovered. But bear in mind, my dear, that there are scores of lovely and lovable men on earth, and perhaps your cloud will yet have a silver lining. Some day you will meet a man whose love will be all your own, and you will be able to see that this first disappointment was all for the best. We would not advise you to try and get him back. If he does not come back of himself his love is not worth having.

"Will you please tell me if you think fifteen is too young to love? I am just that age, and I have just met a young man who is very attractive, and I know he is in love with me and wants me to marry him. People tell me that at my age I don't know my own mind. I should hate to marry him thinking that I love him and then find myself mistaken. LOTTA."

A letter like this is a positive treat! A girl of fifteen who can reason so wisely will not be apt to make many errors. A great deal of the misery in the world has been created through thoughtless and hasty marriages. Women marry men at eighteen whom they despise at twenty-five, or choose husbands at twenty-five whom they have ceased to love or respect at thirty. Human nature is ever changeable, and it is one of the most difficult tasks in the world to discover two intellects that will be perfect mates for life. One may go ahead or lag behind, and because of this the result of marriages is uncertain. We would certainly advise you to wait until you are older. No girl of fifteen is sufficiently well developed mentally or physically to marry, and, furthermore, your education cannot be completed at your age.

"I have been married a year, and, oh, how I regret it! Just think, Miss Shirley, I was an only daughter. I earned ten dollars a week as cloak model down town, and having no board to pay, could use it all in pin money. Now ten dollars a week has to do for a whole family, my husband, myself and a six weeks' old baby. I would give the world if I had never been married, and I write this letter as a warning to others. I do hope you will print it in your correspondence columns. "MRS. G."

We receive so many letters like this one that if we printed them all we are afraid we should discourage matrimony. You should have "looked before you leaped," but that is a thing that young people in love rarely do. It seems strange that love, or whatever the sentiment is that draws some young people together, should so blind their eyes to the future. We are very sorry that you have made such a blunder, but now that you have done it you should make the best of it. For the sake of your child you must "put your shoulder to the wheel" and try to conquer every obstacle that threatens your domestic happiness. Above all, try not to take too many into your confidence in this wise; people will only laugh at you for marrying in haste. It is better to hide your grief and bear the penalty of your own error with silent dignity.

"I have read your Correspondence Department for several weeks with great interest, and wish to add one more to the list of questions. What I want to know is this: Is a woman of thirty too old to marry a man of tweny-one, and what will be the natural outcome of such a union?
"GERTRUDE B."

As a rule, we should answer "yes" to the above question, but there are exceptional cases which demand a different answer. Some men of twenty-one are very mature both mentally and physically, and many women of thirty are as sprightly as kittens. Mentality should always decide this question. If a woman of thirty has every taste in common with a man much younger and feels confident that she possesses sufficient spirit and magnetism to charm him through the years that are before them, she is running very little risk in marrying him. It is true that most women age faster than most men, but the exception is not so rare as it used to be, however. Physical exercise and a more intelligent mode of living are keeping our women young nowadays, while the men are inclined to age a little prematurely.

"I am very much in love with a man of fifty who is a widower with four children, the oldest being only fifteen. Would you advise me to marry him! He has no money of his own—is working on a small salary. ABBIE S."

No, we do not advise you to marry him. The position of step-mother to four children is not an enviable one. No doubt, he wants you to be a mother to his children, a wife to him, cook, housekeeper, needle-woman and perhaps laundress. We advise you to look farther before you marry.

"I have read every number of 'Marion Marlowe,' and I can hardly wait for the weeks to come around. I know a young man who is exactly like 'Bert Jackson,' and I mean to catch him for a husband, if possible. Do you blame me?
"NORA."

I do not indeed, and I wish you success! Young men like "Bert Jackson" are very rare. We advise you to do all that you can, modestly and properly, of course, to make Bert's counterpart fall in love with you. We are sure it will be a happy marriage.

"I am about to be married, my dear Miss Shirley, and I am sure it will surprise you to learn

that I am very unhappy. All my life I have heard and read of the 'perfect bliss' which a young girl feels on the eve of her marriage, yet I am to be married in a week, and I spend half of my time in crying. I think that I love my future husband very dearly, yet I can't bear to give up my girlhood and be a married woman, and then I am beset by the responsibilities and uncertainties of the future. Am I different from other girls, or is this a natural feeling? I cannot talk to my mother on this subject. She is a very peculiar woman and only laughs at my anxieties. C. F. B."

Your condition of mind seems to us to be very natural. The girl who can stand upon the threshold of matrimony and feel differently must be sadly lacking in the elements of common sense and caution. But there is no necessity for leaving your "girlhood behind." Take it right along with you into your married life, only add to it day by day the grace and wisdom of a woman. I have seen many married women who played with dolls in their leisure hours, and I think their husbands really enjoyed witnessing their innocent pleasure. Women, or most of them, "settle down" too thoroughly as soon as they are married. They forget that it was their "girlishness" that first charmed their lovers, and that this same "girlishness" can be made to charm and hold a husband. Never grow old in your husband's eyes if you can help it. As for the responsibilities and uncertainties, they will not all come in a minute. When they do come, you will be surprised to find how easily you can manage them.

"I have been told over and over that all marriages are failures, and as I look about me I am tempted to believe it, yet if this is true, what is the use of living? Must we go on slaving and toiling without a ray of happiness in this life. If marriage is a failure, then love is a failure. Is there anything left worth living or striving for?

"C. V. S."

This letter is the result of some old busy-body's croaking. There are plenty of happy marriages where love reigns supreme, and there will be plenty more if truth is to be relied upon. The people who say that marriage is a failure are usually the ones who have made it a failure by their own foolishness or wickedness. The ideal married life is heaven on earth, and it is possible to all who will strive to attain it. Choose wisely, carefully and with moderation, then remember that the germ of love must be constantly nourished, and that the greatest care is needed to make it bloom fragrantly. Those who expect much are apt to give little. The perfect harmony of the family depends upon mutual effort and a constant endeavor to please one another.

This world would be a sad place indeed were it not for love. The power of affinity holds the universe together.

"Will you please advise me in the following matter: I have received an invitation to dine with a man I have never met. He is a friend of one of my girl friends, and I think she is in love with him. She showed him my picture and now he has written me this letter of invitation. I believe he is rich, and I would like to meet him. Would it be honorable to my friend to accept his invitation? A. F."

First of all, we do not think it would be "honorable" to yourself to dine with a man whom you have never seen or to whom you have never been introduced, and we cannot understand your considering his invitation for a minute. The proper thing for you to do is to pay no attention to the letter. It was decidedly rude and uncomplimentary to you to write it in the first place.

"The social season is just beginning in our town, and there is a party, or ball, or something of the sort almost every evening. I enjoy going out more than anything else, but my parents object to my doing so, and scold me continually. I am sixteen years old, and it does seem to me that I ought to be allowed to have some fun. Don't you think they are awfully mean not to allow me pleasure of this sort? Annie S."

Your parents are a great deal wiser than you are, Annie, and we advise you not to go contrary to their wishes. You are much too young to be thinking of social pastimes. Stay at home for a year or two more at least, and spend your time with your books improving your mind and fitting yourself to be a useful, helpful woman. When you do begin to go out again make your pleasures incidental to your life, and do not allow them to absorb your whole time and thought.

"I have read every number of 'My Queen' and have enjoyed them immensely. I think Marion the sweetest girl that ever lived, and I am sure that her creator, Miss Shirley, is awfully wise. Will she be kind enough to spare time to give me a little advice? I am nineteen years old and have been in society for two years, but, somehow, I don't get along in company a bit. Other girls laugh and talk, but I can never find anything to say, and the men all vote me a bore, I am sure. Can you tell me of some magic method by which I can attain the social graces. Jean R. R."

Thank you for your kind words in regard to "My Queen" and the author's wisdom. Experience is the only teacher, Jean, and a hard one at that. Do not be disheartened if you do not attract the men who like the chattering, giggling girls—probably you will attract the quietest and most substantial, and make firmer friends of them than the other girls could possibly make of the other men. In a general way, you can probably overcome your diffidence and backwardness in conversation by endeavoring to discover in what subject a man is interested and then talking of that. If he finds that you are interested yourself in his fads he will take interest enough in you to interest himself in yours, and then the wheels of conversation will run smoothly enough.

"One of the best fellows in the world has asked me to become his wife. I esteem him highly—I might almost say that I love him if I had not decided long ago to leave the word 'love' out of my

dictionary. I feel that I would be happy indeed if I were his wife, but there is a chapter in my life that I dread to tell him, and still I think too much of him to marry him without being perfectly candid. Won't you tell me what to do? I am heart-broken over the situation.

"MARIE W. S."

It is much better to be frank before marriage than to make two people unhappy after. If this young man really loves you he will forgive much, endure much, condone much, and his affection will still survive in spite of all. If his regard stands the test you will have a husband and lover of whom you may be proud. If it does not you may feel assured that he would have probably made your married life miserable, and that you have saved both him and yourself considerable unhappiness. The man that will listen to your revelation and continue to love you, has in that one act proven his value. The man who does not, likewise proves that his affection is a matter of circumstance, and not the unfailing, all-enduring type that is really of worth. There is an old proverb, "Tell the truth and fear naught," that exactly fits your case.

"I am in love with one of the most charming girls in the United States, but I am not quite sure that she loves me. I have read lots of your good advice to young women, so I hope you will be willing to give me some. I want this girl for my wife, but, frankly, I am afraid to ask her. I have more of her society than any one else as it is, and if she doesn't accept me I am afraid I'll lose it all. Now, won't you please advise me what to do. EDWARD H."

You seem to be a very diffident young man, Edward. If you really love this girl, why don't you tell her so, and see what she says? "Faint heart never won fair lady." If she doesn't love you she will only say "no," and then you can look for another who will perhaps appreciate your timid nature.

"He either fears his fate too much—
Or his deserts are small
Who dreads to put it to the touch
And win or lose it all."

Those lines were written by one of our best students of human nature.

Grace Shirley would advise you to study them carefully, and if you cannot summon up enough courage to test your standing in this young woman's affection we would advise you to retire to a monastery.

"I enjoy going about with the boys more than I do anything else, and as I am a great favorite with them I get lots of invitations. I live with an aunt who makes my life miserable scolding about my keeping late hours. I think she is really jealous because I get attention and she doesn't, but I would like to know some way to avoid the continual quarrels I have with her on the subject. I am nearly eighteen years old, and I think I ought to be allowed to have my own way, don't you? MILDRED D."

Your aunt may not take the wisest way to show you that you are acting foolishly, but her intentions are certainly good. A girl of your years should not spend her time "going about with the boys." You would be doing much better if you would spend your leisure hours fitting yourself to become the wife of some good man who may some day desire your entire society. The attentions of "the boys" may seem very enjoyable now, but a few years later you will no doubt look upon the time spent in this way with regret. Do not be too anxious to have your own way, but remember that other people's views may be much more sensible than your own.

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